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Jason Frost,
Cousins Properties,
Atlanta

Giving MDUs a Backbone

by Jason Knott, photography by Anne States

Cousins Properties brings a host of fiber-based services to its new \$700 million Terminus project in Atlanta.

As every residential developer knows, one of the most difficult parts of any project is coordination, especially in a “new” area — merging a communications infrastructure with other technologies, for example. This is particularly true for guys more comfortable with decisions about land usage, architectural design and construction schedules.


Cousins Properties is a 46-year-old publicly owned, \$48 million developer based in Atlanta. The diversified company’s development expertise covers a broad array of product types — office, retail, urban residential and single-family communities.

Over the past 50 years, Cousins has earned a reputation for creative, industry-leading developments. Given technology’s prominent role in new construction these days, it’s no surprise that the Cousins team is now orchestrating multiple lifestyle needs for its new Terminus development in the Buckhead area of Atlanta. The coordination of this effort has been key.

The \$700 million, 10-acre community offers fiber-to-the-home (FTTH), along with home automation and electronics, in a simplified package for buyers. Cousins partnered with FTTH provider Connexion Technologies, which formulated the package to include installation of Control4 home automation and other electronics by Circuit City.



Telecom provider Connexion Technologies pulled together an installation team that included Circuit City, Simplikate and even furniture manufacturer Ethan Allen. The team reduced Cousins’ upfront capital expenses by amortizing the cost for automation equipment and installation over a long-term contract.



“The package provides our customers with state-of-the-art infrastructure and services that will be good for years to come.”

—JASON FROST, COUSINS PROPERTIES

Minimizing the Vendor Juggle

Best known for landmark office towers, like Bank of America Plaza, One Ninety One Peachtree and Frost Bank Tower (as well as its Avenue concept retail centers), Cousins Properties has broadened its mission in recent years to include multi-family developments.

The company's 2005 acquisition of The Gellerstedt Group has led to one completed development in Midtown Atlanta already, with its first high-rise residential building at Terminus. Upon completion, Terminus will be a \$700 million project. It will include two office towers, three residential towers, more than 580,000 square feet of destination retail and four restaurants — not to mention five acres of open space to help create a sense of community.

Since its founding, Cousins has developed more than 20 million square feet of office space and 20 million square feet of retail space, including seven regional malls. In addition, Cousins has developed more than 4,000 multi-family residential units and 60-plus single-family subdivisions ranging in size from 100 acres to 2,000 acres.

Cousins Properties (NYSE: CUZ) is one of the largest real-estate developers in the United States with more than 32 million square feet of construction space. Geographically, it focuses on fast-growing

Sunbelt states, like Florida, Georgia, Texas and California, and it has developed many of its product types in each of those states.

The residential portion of the Terminus project consists of 700+ luxury condominiums and is set to open in late 2008.

Similar to any major construction initiative, Terminus was a complex orchestration of multiple vendors, technologies and solutions. The more seamlessly these elements can be brought together, the better lifestyle experience for the residents. However, that is easier said than done. The project includes:

- Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH)
- Wi-Fi Access
- Home Automation Systems and Electronics
- Concierge, Valet and Amenity Software
- Property Management and CRM Software
- High-End Electronics (e.g. flat-panel televisions)
- Furniture
- Security Management Systems

Bringing these components together from multiple vendors presents some interesting challenges. Among the key concerns of Cousins throughout the project were:

- Coordinating effective communication among the vendors.
- Managing a combination of low-voltage wiring contractors, multiple service

providers, electronics vendors and furniture providers.

- Reducing redundancies in order to ensure maximum value and cooperation among the various technologies.
- Minimizing conduit in risers.
- Ensuring the right balance between technology sophistication and simplicity.
- Ensuring best-in-class technology.
- Selecting competent vendors that will work together seamlessly.

Cousins initially engaged Cary, N.C.-based Connexion Technologies to install a FTTH infrastructure throughout the Terminus property.

To start, the Connexion Technologies Convergence Team then performed a technology discovery session. The goal of the session was to help Cousins navigate technology choices available for the project and determine how these technologies could be best brought together.

Forming an Integration Team

Connexion has formed integrated partnerships with Circuit City, Simplikate, Control4 and others to help developers attain business goals and provide project management.

Control4 is a home automation technology platform developer and manufacturer with systems that allow residents to control lights,



The \$700 million Terminus project includes four restaurants (top), like Bricktops. It also houses mixed-use office, residential and open space — all connected with a fiber optic backbone and WiFi.

Terminus includes 700+ luxury condos (bottom), each connected to the property manager, concierge and doorman on a fiber optic backbone.

room temperature and other functions.

Simplikate is an advanced property management software system that provides residents with access to such services as concierge, valet, amenity reservations and more. Simplikate can be accessed from any phone, owners' televisions (via the Control4 box) or via a Web browser on any Internet-enabled device. This allows residents to do things like request their car from the valet or order dinner at the touch of a button.

"[Connexion] came to us with a superior technology package at a competitive price," says Jason Frost, vice president at Cousins Properties. "We believe the Simplikate, phone, cable and Internet package is as advanced or superior to anything in the market and very competitively priced." He adds, "We feel that the package provides our customers with state-of-the-art infrastructure and services that will be good for years to come and that they will benefit price-wise on the bulk package pricing for the community."

Circuit City is well known to builders and developers as a major consumer elec-

tronics retailer, but the company is also an integrator. Connexion engaged Circuit City to perform multiple tasks:

- Installation of low-voltage wiring for security and HVAC systems.
- Provision and installation of high-end electronics, such as flat-panel TVs and whole-house audio systems.
- Installation of Control4 set-top boxes compatible with the flat-panel TVs.

Meanwhile, Ethan Allen, a manufacturer of high-end furniture, brought in a range of furniture layouts from which Terminus could choose. Connexion, along with Circuit City, made sure the furniture selections were compatible with the electronics and would support the lifestyle needs of Terminus residents.

Connexion also brought Wi-Fi access and security together on the fiber infrastructure throughout the condominiums and all common areas of Terminus. Connexion manages the voice, data and video services for completely seamless integration of all entertainment and communications services at the site.

Bringing It Together

Frost says the fiber-optic backbone for the project is the key benefit to the overall success, but he also gives credit to the home concierge service from Simplikate, which hooks each unit to the property manager, concierge, doorman, etc. The service also features modules that can be added as well as panel- and Internet-controlled lighting, HVAC and security.

In the end, the technology partnership ensured that:

- **All vendors communicated effectively.** This guaranteed that vendors adhered to on-time completion of the project. It also reduced operational expenses. Most important, it did these things without unnecessary complications.
- **Components were integrated correctly.** This occurred across multiple facets, from ensuring that furniture fit electronics appropriately to making certain that the correct wiring was installed the first time by a single integrator.
- **The construction process was streamlined.** The "convergence consulting methodology" ensured that vendor overlap was minimized and the number of vendors in the project was reduced. The result of the streamlining was simplified overall project management.
- **Capital expenses were reduced.** Connexion helped reduce Cousins' up-front

costs by amortizing the installation of the home automation components — a valuable option for developers looking to minimize capital expense.

Partnership Benefits All Parties

By partnering, these supplier companies were able to penetrate a market that they may not have been able to access on their own. For example, the chances that a company like Ethan Allen could reach every person in one community would have been close to impossible without the relationships formed by Connexion Technologies.

Also, each of these relationships can be beneficial to all. If a developer has a positive impression of one of the vendors (but is unfamiliar with the other partners) they will likely associate that same level of quality with the entire group.

"Connexion basically provides and installs the material infrastructure and then it also goes out and secures competitive rates from the service providers as well. It is a turnkey solution," says Frost. He added that partnering with Circuit City on the in-unit wiring "has been great" to work with because the integration company can also provide the high-rise condo buyers with the electronics they will need for their living experience.

"Since Circuit City did all of the pre-wiring," Frost adds, "it provided a great service to make sure everything is installed to be ready for the different media options that the buyer will need once they move in."

Moreover, since Connexion manages all of the vendor relationships, the responsibility of ensuring compatibility between all of the products falls to the telecom company — not the individual vendors. This takes a burden off a developer like Cousins.

Ultimately, this model benefits the developer as well as the telecom company, which sells more networks and gets ongoing customers. It also benefits the integrator, who makes money selling product charging for installation labor, as well as the technology manufacturers who sell the products. Of course, the ultimate level of satisfaction (and the only one that really counts) is the end user, the condo owner who is more satisfied living an electronics-enhanced lifestyle.

Would Frost recommend this type of partnership to other developers? "Yes I would," he says. "To date, [Cousins partners] have done everything we would have expected and hoped for, and we believe our buyers will be very happy with the end product." **THB**